

Excerpts from my field diary (July 2009 onwards)

Pankaj Oudhia

Rendezvous with Tiger, other than 1411 present in official records.

Pankaj Oudhia

“Are you sure that Tiger is present in this forest?” I asked to Shri Shankar walking with me in dry forest. “Yes, every type of animal is still present in forest. This forest is of plus 500 acres and we are guarding only a part of it.” He further informed.



“I am travelling in this area for long time but I never saw Tiger. I have heard many stories of Tiger but never saw it by own eyes. Few years back when I was climbing this hill, the Traditional Healers travelling with me stopped for a while and then suggested to change the way. I smelled something putrid. The Healers warned that a cave used by Tiger is not far from this place. It is day time, so we must avoid disturbing me. At that place my mobile signals were active. I received a call from friend working in forest department. I informed him that I am standing near the cave of Tiger in Taurenga region. He simply laughed at me and said no Tiger is reported from that region. The Healers travelling with me confirmed its presence many times.” I shared my experiences with Shri Shankar.



“Your forest officer friend was saying right. The presence of this Tiger is not on record. On the day when the officials were here to take pugmarks they found no pugmarks from this region. We informed them about the ground realities but they ignored our experiences and declared that Tiger is not present in the region.” Shri Shankar disclosed. I understood that he was talking about the Tiger not present in list of 1411 Tigers officially present in documents. Suddenly I felt that its our duty to save this unregistered Tiger. The social workers and celebrities with media and multinationals are saying something about 1411 registered Tigers these days. We are not so hopeful but we feel that they will do atleast something to protect them. The unregistered are not in their list. Hence, if they are hunted in forest no one will give ears to this murder as even after death of these unregistered Tigers the number will remain same as 1411. That’s why I am saying that it is our responsibility to protect such Tigers.



“Please see the markings made by the Deer. There are thousands of Deer in this forest. They are surviving only due to our sincere efforts. Hunting is crime and we villagers are doing all sort of efforts to protect it. In Rabi crops these creatures reach to nearby crop fields and farmers face much loss. But they ignore it.” Shri Shankar was continuing and we were following in dry forest.



I observed trees of Kya, Mahua, Harra, Bahera, Aonla and other native trees but that part of forest was dominated by Teak trees. “Oh! It seems that officials have used this virgin forest for cultivation of Teak.” I said.

“Yes, Teak is planted in this forest.” He confirmed.



“It means it is not a natural forest now. It is man made forest. The authorities have used almost all parts of forest for this type of plantation. Why don’t they try to maintain the forest in its natural form? The Britishers were using the forest in this way. They cut dense forests for plantations. Many decades after independence still we are following the same forest policy. Teak is not a food for all animals. When such trees are planted as monoculture in forest it disturbs the entire system. In Bar Nawapara sanctuary Karra trees are in abundance. It is much liked by Bison. In one part of sanctuary the authorities have planted Teak monoculture. They are not allowing other species. Then imagine the condition of the wild animals living in that part of the forest. Teak is not a food for them and Karra like trees were destroyed considering it as weed in Teak plantation. It is not a wise policy.” I said it in one breath. I found Shankar looking at me with surprise.

[Related Films: Oudhia, P. (2010). Visit to Taurenga Forest, Chhattisgarh, India during summer 2010. Part-1. Film by Pankaj Oudhia.

<http://www.pankajoudhia.com/video106.html>

Oudhia, P. (2010). Visit to Taurenga Forest, Chhattisgarh, India during summer 2010. Part-2. Film by Pankaj Oudhia. <http://www.pankajoudhia.com/video107.html>]

“This is Amarphal.” He showed me tree loaded with immature fruits. I identified it as Kumhi. Its fruits are considered toxic. The natives keep it in home in order to keep evil spirits at bay. “If you find its mature fruit and consume it you can live up to thousands years.” He claimed but added that no one has ever seen its fully matured fruit free from poison. It is one in thousands of trees- he said. I respected his belief.

“How Deer in large number are surviving in this region?” I tried to change the topic. “Are you giving them salt and Mahua?” I asked based on my experience in Kanha National Park. In Kanha I was informed by the natives that in early days there were large groups of Deer present. There was arrangement to feed them salt and Mahua for faster multiplication. Now this practice has been stopped. During recent visit to Mysore for International Conference on Biodiversity I interacted with Dr. R.K. Pandey who regularly visits to Kanha. He confirmed that still salt is mixed in soil for Deer and other animals.

“No, Deer in this forest are living by their own. No one is giving salt or Mahua. Still they are multiplying. “Shri Shankar informed.

“Pangolin is very shy animal but it is present in good number in this forest. If you have seen the crocodile it means you have seen the Pangolin. Both are like maternal sisters in appearance. You can expect it during this visit.” This good news was from the friends of Shri Shankar walking with us. I said it good news because Pangolin are in great danger in my region. Its meat is considered delicious and it is killed for scales. Scales are used in traditional as well as modern medicines. Shri Shankar confirmed it. “The cost of Pangolin’s scale is 5000 Rs. per Kg. One average Pangolin yields four kg of scales. One kill gives 10 Kg of delicious meat. There is good demand of this meat in open market. It is considered as aphrodisiac.” These figures were shocking. In rural areas thousands of rupees per kill are very valuable. It made me aware that Pangolin is in great danger in this part also.

“When Pangolin is in danger then Tiger must be in danger in this region?” I asked. “No, Tiger is worshiped in this region. Famous temple of Goddess is inside forest. Tiger visits to this temple at night. It is common belief. No one harms Tiger and Tiger harms no one. It remains in dense forest during day time and at night it comes out. You can hear its roar from distance. It neither destroys crop nor kills cattle like Leopard and Deer. Farmers consider Leopard as enemy but not Tiger.” He explained.

I passed several hours in forest with them, saw medicinal species and wild animals but not Tiger. Then decided to return back. On way there was dense forest. The Healers travelling with me suggested to cross it in daylight but large swarm of red colored caterpillars on wild trees attracted my attention and we stayed their till night. When we were returning, an alarming call of monkey warned everyone that the king is somewhere around. I took out my jungle torch and by sitting inside the car started searching the king. In far nallah, we saw the king with typical strips.



“The unregistered friend.” I said. The Healers confirmed it.

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